TL 7453

Seven East Timorese seek asylum in embassies

TAPOL, the Indonesia Human Rights Campaign, today issued the following press release. All solidarity groups are requested to make immediate representations to the Swedish and Finnish governments, through the embassies in their country, for the seven men to be granted asylum.

EAST TIMORESE STUDENTS SEEK POLITICAL ASYLUM IN SWEDISH AND FINNISH EMBASSIES

Seven young East Timorese who have been on the run from the Indonesian army for nearly two years have today gone into the Swedish and Finnish embassies in Jakarta to ask for political asylum. They have all had terrifying experiences at the hands of the army of occupation, especially since the Santa Cruz massacre on 12 November 1991 when Indonesian troops shot dead more than 200 peaceful demonstrators.

All seven went into hiding in East Timor after the massacre and eventually left the country last year, since when they have been on the run in Jakarta. As fugitive aliens in over-crowded Jakarta, without documents or social support, they have lived a precarious existence, haunted by the threat of capture. Attempts to leave the country illegally have been unsuccessful.

In recent months, army military intelligence has stepped up its pursuit of East Timorese students studying in universities throughout Java. Fully-armed platoons are known to have surrounded student residences in Jakarta at night. The most recent incident took place on 18 May.

The three men now in the Swedish embassy are: Florencio Anunciacao Fernandes, 22, who participated in the 12 November 1991 demonstration and was forced to abandon his studies after being constantly pursued by the army; Porfirio da Costa Oliveira, 23, who was badly wounded during the massacre and was treated by Catholic nuns for several months before fleeing to Jakarta; and Jose Manuel de Oliveira Sousa, 24, also a demonstrator in November 1991, who escaped arrest four days later with his brother but they got separated and his brother has since disappeared.

The four in the Finnish embassy are: Mateus Brito Ximenes, 23, who fled the army although severely wounded during massacre and reached Jakarta last July; Clementino Faria, 27, who was hounded by the army after taking part in a demonstration in January 1990 when the UN ambassador visited Dili; Oscar Goncalves da Silva, 20, who escaped arrest after the 1991 demonstration; and Ventura Valentino de Conceicao, 23, who was detained and tortured after demonstrating during the Pope's visit to Dili in October 1989 and later took part in a pro-independence rally at his school in September 1990.

In statements to the Swedish and Finnish ambassadors, the fugitive students said:

We come to you as witnesses to the Indonesian military brutality which, since December 7, 1975, has become a fact of everyday life in East Timor, a military brutality which has consisted of torture, rape, intimidation, terror and slaughter of the kind the world witnessed on 12 November 1991 in Dili, a military brutality which has robbed us of the right to an education, has made us foreigners in our own country, and has now forced us to leave our beloved homeland and our families and friends.

It is clear that the Indonesian government will exert all possible pressure on the Swedish and Finnish governments to convince them to hand over the seven students. TAPOL has issued an appeal to both governments to resist this pressure and give them asylum in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Protocol on Refugees.

A number of West Papuan and Acehnese fugitives from Indonesian persecution have already been given asylum in Sweden.

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PRESS RELEASE

23 June 1993

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